

Watching Nature From My Window

Being naturally more interested in what is going on outside than inside, I find myself gazing out the window at the vegetation and especially the critters out there. And frequently one of those critters does something really interesting, surprising, or even funny. Here are a few of the incidents I have seen recently.

One morning while working on my computer I kept hearing a tapping noise from the room across the hall. Going to investigate, the noise stopped. The next day the same thing happened. It finally occurred to me that it might be a bird at the window, so the next time I heard it I was much more careful going into the room quietly and slowly and there it was, a flycatcher on the window sill pecking at the window. Over the past few weeks, this little bird came pecking on several occasions.

My friend, Bill Lindemann, tells a story of a turkey doing the same thing and ascribed it to the bird seeing its reflection in the window and attacking the reflection. A few years ago we had a titmouse that was waging war against that titmouse he saw in the mirror of my pickup—it went on for weeks!

Speaking of titmice, not long ago I caught some activity out of the corner of my eye out on the porch that seemed strange. It looked like a titmouse had flown onto a branch of a large potted plant, carrying a large object. Well, titmice are seed eaters and it seemed to be past nesting time, so a titmouse carrying any large object seemed strange. Through binoculars it looked like the titmouse was pecking something it was holding with its foot on a branch, but I also saw something that looked like a hummingbird just below the branch. Going out to get a better look, as I approached, the titmouse flew away empty-handed (empty beaked?) in one direction and a hummingbird flew away in another direction. I can only conclude that the titmouse had the hummingbird by the wing and was pecking at it.

But predators can be prey too. One day I saw a roadrunner on a path in our yard bashing something in its beak on the ground. The view from my binoculars showed it to be a titmouse! A few days later I heard a commotion on the porch and looked up to see a roadrunner jumping up into a small shrub just off the porch. Putting two and two together, I realized that the titmice and cardinals like to land in that bush and then hop down from there to drink in the saucers under some of the plants on the porch (this is in spite of the perfectly good water feature I provide for them a few yards away!). That was probably where the roadrunner had caught the titmouse earlier.

I have always been amused to watch hummingbirds bathing in the thin sheet of water that flows over one of the rocks in our recirculating “creek”, especially early in the morning. Lately, after watering some perennials and shrubs, I have noticed the hummingbirds bathing on the wet leaves—kind of a hummingbird “sponge” bath I guess.

We have two bird feeders in our backyard and the birds spill some of the sunflower seeds on the ground below. Some of the birds, as well as the squirrels, spend a lot of time on the ground picking up spilled seeds. But they apparently don't get all of them because we sometimes see a raccoon in the early evening doing the same thing. It amazes me that they can distinguish whole seeds from hulls, but apparently they can. The raccoons and squirrels appear to do it with their "hands".

A few weeks ago I was watching a raccoon doing this when I saw a gray fox slowly creeping toward the raccoon. Then all of a sudden the fox rushed the raccoon, obviously surprising and scaring it, and the raccoon raced a few feet up a tree. The raccoon obviously outweighs the fox by quite a bit. The fox then began to search for seeds himself. But shortly, the raccoon, apparently recovered from its surprise, rushed the fox and chased it away. No blows, no bites, but the raccoon established its dominance and the little fox didn't return.

Until next time...

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